

Specialised Interviewing

Interviewing Specialists on Sensitive Topics

Anna Di Ronco

t. +32 9 264 69 46

f. +32 9 264 69 71

Anna.DiRonco@UGent.be



Specialised interviewing

HEADER

*Who are they (elites v **specialists**)?*

Persons who have a specialized information about, or who have involvement with, any social or political processes (Dexter, 2008)

- *Elites* are people in close proximity to power, deeply influential for the policy-making process (politicians, ministers, head of state, presidents, lobbyists, CEOs etc.)
- ***Specialists*** are experts in particular areas (lawyers, top civil servants, compliance officers, etc.)

Specialised interviewing: pros and cons

footer

1. Advantages

- Individual insights on the research context
 - Exploratory research and hypothesis testing
- In-depth information (useful to interpret documents)
- First-hand accounts (off-the-records)
- Network (access to other respondents)

2. Disadvantages (problems)

- Access
- (Unrepresentative) sampling *
- Bias
- Tape recording
- Coding and analysis

* Not necessarily a problem, insofar as the researcher acknowledges it (Richards, 1996)

Before the interview: Access (1)

footer

1. Call them

- Introduce yourself
 - Affiliation with university or research institute, drop names if you can (gate-keepers) etc.
- *Mention* the research project and the content of the interview

2. Follow up with an email

- Make it official
 - Logo of the university and/or research institute
- Spell out the *basic* research content
- Explain *why them*
 - Research question(s)
 - Preferably, mention some (flattery) evidence (reports, statistics etc.)
- Place emphasis on *their* interest in the research
 - E.g., they can use the data you will collect
- (Cover the ground-rules)
 - E.g., use of tape recorder, how the information will be utilised etc.
- Anonymity and confidentiality
 - They might be requested by the respondent as a condition to accept the interview (e.g., confidentiality agreements)

research

publications

consultancy

conferences



Institute for
International Research on Criminal Policy
Ghent University



Crime, Criminology
& Criminal Policy

Research Consortium Ghent University

www.ircp.org

Anna Di Ronco
+32 9 264 69 46
Anna.DiRonco@UGent.be

Before the interview: Access (2)

footer

3. Call them again (schedule the interview)

- Ask for an intermediate length (e.g., 45 min-1 hour)

4. Follow up with an email (*check-list*)

- (General) list of main topics

5. Get well prepared (practice)

- E.g., to avoid asking questions on information you can easily find elsewhere (websites, official documents etc.)

research

publications

consultancy

conferences



Institute for
International Research on Criminal Policy
Ghent University



www.ircp.org

Anna Di Ronco
+32 9 264 69 46
Anna.DiRonco@UGent.be

During the interview – best practices (1)

footer

1. Introduction

- Be ready to (once again) introduce yourself and the research project
- Be confident, professional and knowledgeable

2. *Rapport*

- Pay attention to the dress code
- Avoid academic (and technical) jargon
- Be an (emphatic) listener
- Encourage the respondent non verbally
- Give silence a chance

During the interview – best practices (2)

footer

3. Semi-structured interviews (conversation guide or *checklist*)

- List of main topics
- Ask open questions
 - Start with general questions and proceed with more specific ones
 - Ask probe and follow-up questions
 - Leave the most sensitive questions to the middle of the interview (trust)
 - Ensure that the respondent does not go too far off the subject
 - Pay attention to how questions are formulated (and not to steer answers)
- Take down some notes using *keywords*
- Pay attention to non verbal behaviour
- Keep it open
 - At the end of the interview, always ask if there are other areas you have not touched upon, that the interviewee may be willing to comment

After the interview

footer

1. Extend the notes *asap* (memory does not last that long!)

2. Thank them via email

- Send the transcripts of the interview (or a summary of it), if requested
- Ask further questions or clarifications
- Establish networks

research

publications

consultancy

conferences



Institute for
International Research on Criminal Policy
Ghent University



Crime, Criminology
& Criminal Policy
Research Consortium Ghent University

www.ircp.org

Anna Di Ronco
+32 9 264 69 46
Anna.DiRonco@UGent.be

www.ircp.org

Contact

Anna Di Ronco

t. +32 9 264 69 46

f. +32 9 264 69 71

Anna.DiRonco@UGent.be

IRCP

Ghent University
Universiteitstraat 4
B – 9000 Ghent

